

Sabbatical Report, Spring 2024

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During my sabbatical leave, I conducted an in-depth research project examining international media representations of marginalized and vulnerable communities in global climate change reporting. Titled, “*Hottest Year on Record: Climate Change & International News Coverage*”, this project builds upon more than three decades of my scholarly work in environmental, health, and international communication, with a particular focus on how media systems reflect and reproduce global power inequalities.

The primary goal of the sabbatical was to advance at least one article (or a monograph) that synthesizes my long-term research agenda on international environmental journalism and climate communication. Specifically, the project investigates how international news coverage of climate change represents—or fails to represent—the concerns of nations and populations located on the periphery of the global system, especially those most at risk from climate-related harm. Guided by World Systems Theory, the research interrogates how global media discourse reflects unequal power relations between core, semi-peripheral, and peripheral nations in the context of climate negotiations.

I should note that I took the first month of the sabbatical to travel solo in search of my next research project. I went on a safari in Kenya (which was life changing). It sparked my interest in nature photography and reminded me that at heart I am a filmmaker first. I also visited Tanzania, South Africa (for the music) and Bali. While abroad, I was able to read about the Trump administration’s agenda on the environment, which was disturbing but necessary.

Upon return from my journey, I collected and analyzed a substantial body of international news coverage focused on key climate science and policy events, particularly the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) conferences and Conferences of the Parties (COP). This included media content from a diverse range of countries and regions, including the United States, United Kingdom, European Union, India, China, Russia, South Africa, Brazil, and other nations in the Global South. This cross-cultural dataset allows for a comparative and longitudinal examination of how climate change is framed across political, economic, and cultural contexts.

Methodologically, the sabbatical enabled me to develop a comprehensive coding scheme and conduct both quantitative content analysis and qualitative critical discourse analysis. This mixed-methods approach facilitated identification of recurring themes, dominant sources, narrative frames, and representations of responsibility, risk, and vulnerability in climate reporting. Particular attention was paid to whose voices were amplified, marginalized, or excluded in international climate discourse, and how media coverage may either exacerbate or mitigate geopolitical tensions surrounding climate responsibility and action.

A significant outcome of the sabbatical was a manuscript draft which I am still editing. I presented my article at the annual convention of the International Association of Mass Communication Research in Christchurch, New Zealand. Venues such as these provide important platforms for disseminating findings to scholars, journalists, policymakers, and environmental communication practitioners and for receiving feedback. I am currently preparing this article for submission to a top-tier publication in my field.

The sabbatical has had direct and lasting benefit upon my scholarship while at for Sonoma State. The research has strengthened my teaching by allowing me to integrate current, globally relevant scholarship into courses such as *Environmental Communication (Coms 323)* and *International Communication (Coms 321)*. The monograph will be used as assigned course material, benefiting students across Communication and Media Studies, Environmental Studies and Planning, and Global Studies. More broadly, this work enhances SSU's visibility and reputation in the critical area of climate change and environmental sustainability, aligning with the university's mission to foster global engagement and socially relevant scholarship.

Over all, the sabbatical provided essential time and focus for regeneration, helped me advance my research agenda, enrich my teaching, and promote Sonoma State University as a site of impactful, internationally-engaged scholarship on one of the most urgent issues of our time: How the international media frames awareness about Climate Change.